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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session and its contribution to shaping a gender perspective in the realization of the Millennium Development Goals

Statement by the Association of Presbyterian Women of Aoteaora (New Zealand), Church Women United, Global Action on Aging, Lutheran World Federation, Presbyterian Church USA, Salvation Army, United Methodist Church General Board of Church and Society, World Conference of Religions for Peace, World Student Christian Federation, World Young Women's Christian Association and World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2010/1.

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Statement

Partners for change: faith-based response to the review of the Beijing Platform for Action

1. Ecumenical Women, a coalition of Christian organizations and denominations and non-governmental organizations, welcomes the 15-year review of the Beijing Platform for Action by the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women.

2. We affirm the promotion of gender equality and justice from a human rights perspective. We maintain that the contributions and empowerment of women and girls of all ages are fundamental, enshrined in the Platform for Action and international laws, and necessary for achieving all the Millennium Development Goals.

3. Despite 15 years of national policies and international agreement for advancing women's rights, the goals of the Platform for Action remain unfulfilled. Existing United Nations resources and mechanisms are inadequate for eradicating and addressing the deprivations of human dignity faced by women. Ecumenical Women and our coalition members urgently stress the importance of using the review process to advance the goals of the Platform for Action and commit ourselves as partners in that process.

4. The Platform for Action will remain unfulfilled unless it is recognized that existing institutional structures are inherently gender-biased and need to be critically examined and radically transformed. Institutional barriers (in governmental, corporate, social, academic, educational, civil, familial, ecclesiastical and other religious structures, and the United Nations system itself) prevent equality between men and women and deny women's rights as human rights.

5. Ecumenical Women affirms that God's world was meant to be one of abundance for all persons, with fundamental rights and dignity for both women and men. Women, however, are disproportionately robbed of this abundance. We are called to challenge the gender bias of institutions and seek justice for those who are blocked by institutional barriers.

6. Patriarchal understandings of gender, power and leadership; violence against women; limitations in the economic and educational advancement of women; and the extreme vulnerability of marginalized women are among the greatest barriers to women's advancement. Progress will require systemic institutional change.

Gender, power and leadership

7. Decision-making by today's leaders comes at the expense of the majority of women, men and communities by maintaining a system of patriarchy, gender constructs and the subordination of others. The impact of unjust power relations has resulted in widening inequality between women and men. Even with some notable advances, the majority of women's lives are still characterized by economic and political marginalization, poverty and violence.

8. Although women make significant contributions, their full potential and ability as decision makers are undervalued by society. Many women are socialized and relegated to marginalized roles or non-paid work, or are limited to low-wage professions with little decision-making power. For women who succeed in reaching

positions of power, some face a male-dominated culture that prompts them to perpetuate patterns of patriarchal leadership and then they are criticized for doing so.

9. Power relations between women and men pervade our society. Leadership and power structures in all institutions need to be critically analysed from a gender perspective. Civil, legal and sacred texts need to be reinterpreted using language that promotes gender equality and justice. The feminist principles of caring, sharing, consensus-building, creativity and partnership offer alternative models of leadership and power.

Violence against women

10. Despite numerous international resolutions, domestic abuse, rape, trafficking and other forms of violence against women and girls persist. Globally, more than 75 per cent of the violence against women is perpetrated by men and is rooted in a society that undervalues women. The media, when it presents women and girls as sexual objects, creates an environment that perpetuates this violation and is itself a form of violence.

11. Justice systems do little to prosecute those responsible for crimes against women and impunity reigns. Many survivors of rape are not provided with the legal, medical, social, and psychological care needed to recover, move to a place of healing and receive justice.

12. To end this cycle of violence, men must cease to be socialized into dominating masculinities. All should receive gender awareness education that fosters their involvement in peaceful, community-based movements for gender justice. The global White Ribbon Campaign is an example of men working to end violence against women.

Economic barriers to women's advancement

13. Women's economic empowerment means being able to use their rights, capabilities, resources and opportunities to make strategic choices and decisions. This requires systems that promote women's inherent capabilities and equal access to opportunities and resources — most notably the ability to own and inherit land.

14. Women's multiple familial and community roles limit their opportunities for formal employment. Pension and social security systems based on formal market employment discriminate against stay-at-home parents and informal workers, among whom women are heavily represented.

15. Neoliberal macroeconomic policies put at risk the economic gains made by women over the last several decades. Women and girls of all ages, approximately two thirds of the world's impoverished, have little capacity to cope with financial shocks. The inadequacy, and even absence of, social protection policies have left millions of women in desperate straits. Employment stereotypes create discrepancies in hiring, with some areas favouring women as "cheap" labour or men as "breadwinners".

Education and training of women

16. Lack of access to quality education and social discrimination remain significant barriers to women's advancement. Girls account for 54 per cent of children not enrolled in primary school and are more likely to withdraw before completing a full course of education. Women aged 15 years and over account for two thirds of the world's illiterate population. Girls and women are particularly vulnerable in developing countries, in which educational environments fail to encourage their equal participation. In some regions, lack of appropriate sanitation facilities results in up to 10 per cent of girls leaving school once they begin menstruating. Without adequate education, women are less likely to have access to economic and technological services, and are unable to participate fully in society.

17. Even in countries with high education rates, women are discouraged from pursuing certain fields of study. Lack of economic support for women's education and societal pressures mean some academically strong women fail to complete advanced education.

18. While women and girls receive informal education and skills training in their homes or local communities, such education continues to be undervalued. This informal education held by women, however, can be essential to the planning, implementation and success of community or local development projects.

Vulnerability of marginalized women and girls

19. Marginalized women lack adequate Government protection and face social and legal marginalization and discrimination. These women include, but are not limited to, migrants; indigenous people; internally displaced or stateless people; refugees; ethnic, religious, racial or sexual minorities; disabled, divorced, older, poor, homeless, trafficked or rural persons; single parents; and prisoners.

20. Many migrant women are denied the rights and services guaranteed to citizens and cannot access legal protections offered by their host countries — most notably for work-related abuses.

21. Indigenous women face environmental degradation, climate change, seizures of sacred land and traditional territories, cultural discrimination, racism, and limits on resource ownership. Access to resources is increasingly limited and controlled by patriarchal structures. States and transnational corporations decimate natural landscapes, and criminalize or target indigenous owners protecting their land.

22. Trafficked women and girls, seen as commodities, are victims of criminal activities that strip them of their fundamental human rights and dignity. Many are poor, less educated and unaware of their rights. Despite greater attention to trafficking, national and international implementation of related policies remains insufficient.

Ecumenical Women, therefore, urges the following action:

23. By the Commission on the Status of Women:

(a) To work closely with the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women to ensure that the vision of the GEAR Campaign is enacted within the United Nations and at the national and international levels;

(b) To fulfil its mandate as stated in Economic and Social Council resolution 1987/22 to promote, monitor and review State progress on the Platform for Action;

(c) To produce recommendations on the Platform for Action at the fifty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women for adoption by the General Assembly;

(d) To ensure that women's voices are heard at the United Nations by setting an agenda for the advancement of women's rights in consultation with civil society, non-governmental organizations and the global South;

(e) To choose the theme of positive masculinity as a focus of a future session of the Commission on the Status of Women in order to engender mutual partnership in addressing women's rights.

24. By the United Nations community:

(a) The General Assembly should fund and implement its resolution 63/311;

(b) The United Nations, using a coherent system, should end gender inequalities within all its institutions;

(c) Women must be involved in all levels of planning and implementation;

(d) The United Nations should work in partnership with civil society for maximum and sustainable impact;

(e) According to its own resolutions, the Security Council must enable United Nations peacekeeping missions to protect women and girls who are trapped in combat zones, especially from sexual violence.

25. By United Nations Member States:

(a) To guarantee that adequate funding is available to fulfil all laws and policies aimed at advancing women's rights;

(b) To "engender" institutions by reforming structures, policies and activities in order to reflect the different experiences, leadership styles and ways of working between women and men;

(c) To ratify, implement and remove any reservations to existing international treaties, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, with particular attention to women's advancement, the provision of justice and an end to impunity;

(d) To implement Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000), 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009) and 1889 (2009) and General Assembly resolutions 63/155 and 63/156 with regard to violence against women in armed conflict;

(e) To motivate men to partner women in ending violence and discrimination against women through positive masculinities training, gender awareness and human rights education;

(f) To ensure women's full participation in the economic sector by removing legal, educational, employment, ownership and social service barriers; creating incentives; and enabling women's decision-making in micro- and macroeconomic policies;

(g) To include women's uncompensated work in calculations of gross domestic product, quality of life and international economic indices; provide compensation for caretaking and informal roles; and guarantee pensions and social security systems that count uncompensated labour as work;

(h) To ensure women's equal access to education and training through:

(i) The removal of all barriers to women's educational success;

(ii) An increase in public spending for both informal and formal education;

(iii) The creation of incentive programmes to encourage girls' participation in primary education;

(iv) The establishment of human rights and community education programmes;

(v) The development of gender-inclusive teacher training and curricula;

(vi) Modernization of school sanitation facilities;

(vii) Promotion of educational models that equip women, especially marginalized women, to assume positions of leadership and decision-making;

(viii) Reporting of and improvement in girls' participation and the gender and cultural sensitivity of educational environments.

26. In addition, it should be ensured that marginalized women receive greater attention and are guaranteed full coverage of social services, equal rights and legal protection, regardless of legal status.

27. Marginalized women should be engaged within the political, economic, legal and social arenas as critical stakeholders in policymaking and decision-making.

28. Funding should be provided for anti-bias education at the local and national levels with a view to eradicating social stigmas, stereotypes and discrimination.

29. Reparations should be provided for deprivations to marginalized communities, particularly the women of those communities.